Editorials by the Laity

Life's Resources Open Only to Poets.

By Vernon Lee.

IF you notice people on a holiday you will see them doing a large amount of "nothing," dawdling, in fact; and "amusements" are, when they are not excitements—that is to say, stimulations to deficient energy, full of such doing nothing. Think, for instance, of amusing conversation with its gaps and skippings and amusing reading with its perpetual chances of inattention.

All this is due to the majority of us being too weak, too badly born and bred, to give full attention, except under the constraint of necessary work or under the lash of some sort of excitement; and as a consequence to our obtaining a sense of real well being only from the spare energy which accumulates during idleness. Moreover, under our present conditions, as under those of slave labor, work is rarely such as calls forth the effortless, the willing, the pleased attention. Either in kind or length or intensity work makes a greater demand than can be met by the spontaneous, happy activity of most of us, and thereby diminishes the future chances of such spontaneous activity by making us weaker in body and mind.

Now, so long as work continues to be thus strained or against the grain, play is bound to be either an excitement, which leaves us poorer and more tired than before or else play will be mere dawdling, getting out of training—in a measure, demoralization.

Art is so much less useful than it should be because of this bad division of "work" and "play," between which two it finds no place. For art—and the art we unwittingly practice whenever we take pleasure in nature—is without appeal either to the man who is straining at business or to the man who is dawdling in amusement. Esthetic pleasure implies energy during rest and leisureliness during labor. It means making the most of whatever beautiful and noble possibilities may come into our life.

"We should learn to have noble desires," wrote Schiller, "in order to have no need for sublime resolutions." And morality might almost take care of itself if people knew the strong and exquisite pleasures to be found, like the aromatic ragwort growing on every wall and stone heap in the south, everywhere in the course of every day life.

But, alas! the openness to cheap and simple pleasures means the fine training of fine faculties, and mankind asks for the expensive and farfetched and unwholesome pleasures because it is itself of poor and cheap material and of miserable, scamped manufacture.

The various things I have been saying have been said, or, better still, taken for granted by Wordsworth, Keats, Browning, Ruskin, Stevenson, by all our poets in verse and prose. What I wish to add is that, being a poet, seeing and feeling like a poet, means quite miraculously multiplying life's resources for oneself and others, in fact, the highest practicality conceivable, the real transmutation of brass into gold. What we all waste, more even than money, land, time, and labor, more than we waste the efforts and rewards of other folks, and the chances of enjoyment of unborn generations, what we waste more than anything else is our own and our children's unborn capacity to see and feel as poets do and make much out of little material.

There is no machine refuse, cinder, husk, paring, or rejected material of any kind which modern ingenuity cannot turn to profit, making useful and pleasant goods out of such rubbish as we would willingly, at first sight, shoot out of the universe into chaos. Every material thing can be turned, it would seem, into new textures, clean metal, fertilizer, fuel, or whatnot. But while we are economical with our dust heaps, what horrid wastefulness goes on with our sensations, impressions, memories, emotions, with our souls and all the things that minister to their delight!

An ignorant foreign person—and, after all, everybody is a foreigner somewhere and ignorant about something—once committed the enormity of asking his host, just back from cub hunting, whether the hedge rows, when he went out of a morning, were not quite lovely with those dewy cobwebs which the French call veils of the Virgin. It had to be explained that such a sight was the most unwelcome imaginable since it was a sure sign there would be no scent. The poor foreigner was duly crestfallen.

But the blunder struck me as oddly symbolical. Are we not, most of us, pursuing for our pleasure, though sometimes at risk of our necks, a fox of some kind, worth nothing as meat, little as fur, good only to gallop after, and whose unclean scent is incompatible with those sparkling gossamers, flung, for every one's delight, over gorse and hedge row?

Madness Akin to Happiness.

By Prof. Cesare Lombroso.

ANY one who visits a lunatic asylum for a few hours where he hears desperate shrieking imagines he has come to a place of suffering. But after remaining there for some little time he agrees that only there can be met a type of happiness so prolonged and so complete as to offer the key to the condition of joy that is so extremely fleeting in normal beings. The idiot first boasts of his physical qualities and capabilities, his excellent singing, his enormous weight, his chest of steel, his speed that enables him to run a thousand miles a minute, his bodily secretions of fine wines and precious metals. Today he is general of Europe, king of Rome and the stars; tomorrow he will be pope, anti-pope, coin specialist, and prime minister. Some lunatics for a few months in the year manifest extraordinary activity and cheerfulness, but all of a sudden they collapse.

Some men of genius were analogously smitten: Poe, Comte, Schopenhauer.

Tasso and Cardano wished it inferred that they were inspired by God. Mohammed avowed openly that he actually was. Any criticism of their opinions they looked upon as extreme persecution. Newton was said to have been murderously infuriated against his scientific contradictors. The poet Lucius would not rise when Julius Cæsar entered the assembly of poets because he considered himself the better versifier. The princess de Conti informing Malherbe that she would show him the most beautiful verses in the world he said: "Excuse me, I have already seen them, because if, as you say, they are better than any others, I must have written them myself." Victor Hugo was governed by the obsession of being not only the greatest of all poets but the greatest of all men of all countries of all ages.

One might suppose that all of these, in their imagined greatness, would be the happiest of men. However, this is by no means the case, for the worm of the persecution idea gnaws at the most roseate visions of geniuses, as if they were actual maniacs. It is almost proverbial, this tendency to melancholy among most thinkers. Just because their sight reaches farther than the ordinary, and because occupied with too sublime flights, they have not commonplace habits of mind, and because, like idiots and unlike people of mere talent, they are frequently unbalanced. Therefore geniuses are despised and misunderstood by the majority, who do not perceive their points of contact with the rest of mankind, but who do see their eccentricities of conduct and the fact that their views disagree with those generally accepted. "There never has been a liberal idea," writes the famous novelist Faubert, "which has not been unpopular; not a true thing that has not scandalized the multitude."

Cardano, the Italian physicist and mathematician, declared himself the seventh genius of creation, adding that only one was born every ten centuries. He affirmed that he had learned Greek and Latin in three days, had solved 40,000 problems, and made 200,000 discoveries. He claimed to have risen again after death. This man was haunted by the notion that he had innumerable enemies who were all conspiring against his life, and he accused the faculty of the university at Padua of attempting to poison him. Cardano was in the habit of wearing a suit and headdress of thick leather. In the daytime he would wear leaded soles weighing eight pounds and at night would rove around armed to the teeth, his face covered with black cloths.

Geniuses indeed enjoy moments of supernal felicity. These are the moments of creative frenzy which in so many respects resemble the psychic excesses of epileptics only, since not an ordinary brain is being agitated by convulsions but a great mind, and instead of some atrocious bestiality or dark crime there results a work of lofty character. Beaconsfield wrote that he felt as if there were but a step from intense mental concentration to madness. He said he could hardly describe what he felt in the moments when his sensations were abnormally acute and intense, that everything about him seemed to be alive, that he seemed to be raving and was scarcely certain that he really existed.

Analogous are the impressions of St. Paul, Nietzsche, and Dostojevski. And the illustrious Beethoven says: "Musical inspiration is to me that mysterious state in which the whole world appears to shape itself into a vast harmony where every feeling and every thought I have seems to resound within me, where all the forces of nature seem to become instruments for me, where my whole body is seized with violent shivering and my hair stands up on end."

Real and Ideal on Common Ground.

By Ada May Krecker.

PEOPLE are saying a good deal about things getting sordid and about our artists and educators and priests commercializing their ideals. Maybe so. But some folks are finding that a good many of our current ideas are making for spirituality.

If the idealists are becoming materialized the materialists are spiritualizing. They are feeling a leaven of something that is more than meat and raiment or this too, too solid flesh and rocky earth. If education is being commercialized trade is getting cultured. And if religion, as some malcontents avow, is offering truce to modern thought and discovery, science is interesting itself in immortality and the survival of souls after death and the place of the spirit world. If art is flavored with utilitarianism the practical and useful are acquiring beauty, and thus fulfilling a supreme end of art as conceived by Ruskin and others. Extremes are meeting and blending as one phase of our democracies.

In the older days things were rigidly partitioned off and each staid in his own pigeonhole and had the clothes and vocation that befitted it. The gayly caparisoned merchantmen were illiterate and the schoolmen and erudite monks in their barren cells knew nothing of the world, and the artists were little subject to laws, or rather outlaws to themselves. Nowadays each of these tastes something of the life of the others and imparts to it some of his own. Long hair and letters do not satisfy contemporary lion hunters. For, as Richard Harding Davis has said, a modern author to be popular in the drawing room must be on intimate terms with it and be able to dance and to dress as well as to write and publish.

The representative college man has to apply his learning to worldly affairs in order to fulfill public expectations. Decorated with several sets of degrees, he still consecrates them all to the making of money. And the inevitable sequence is that it infuses itself into his business, with the consequence that his business signally flourishes. Hence commercial enterprises are looking for educated managers. The university graduate is too conspicuously successful in trade for the business world not to know him and value him, and with its distinguished energy, to try to get more of him. Hence the rapidly increasing proportion of college men in business, and the steady rise of educational qualifications for commercial life.

Character qualifications are having a similar boom. It is fascinatingly interesting to read and hear of how much could be done on the quiet long ago, everybody not directly implicated remaining the while blissfully unaware of all the enormities. And it is quite as entertaining to observe how little can be effected nowadays without somebody finding you out and telling about it. Politics and business operate under the limelight in the twentieth century.

The occultists talk of a time when thoughts will be read easily by all the world, and hypocrisy and deception of every sort will have outlived their usefulness. These coming days seem to be casting their shadows before. People are growing altogether intolerant of cheats and pickpockets, no matter how grandiose the scale of the exploits or with what official magnificence they may be gilded. Kings and dignitaries can do all manner of wrong today and they have no divine rights. And this although the church and religion are supposed by some to have capitulated to the world.

Well and good if they have, for the world makes good use of the surrendered trophies, the ethical ideals for public and private. And if the church has given hostages to materialistic thought, science in turn has set itself the task of proving some of the old verities of religion. It is annexing new and bigger worlds as legitimate territory for conquest: the next world, the spirit world, the superphysical world, and their inhabitants. It is demonstrating the vanity and evanescence and unreality of the substantial and tangible, the permanence and genuineness of the ideal and invisible. Those at the vanguard of scientific thought avow this. See Crookes and Lodge and Ramsay and Rutherford and their confrères. They are reverting to the sublime idealism of Plato and Pythagoras and other transcendentalists.

With art the story reads the same. If art is getting barren and commercial it is because nonart is acquiring picturesque beauty. You cannot compare the old cities and the old homes and the old clothes without feeling this. The ancient Hindoos speak of the descent of spirit into matter. Here it is in one of its phases. Art is interpreted in terms of sanitation and hygiene and daintiness and the luxury that is comfort. Thereby it fulfills in its own way the ideals of William Morris that the useful should be beautiful and do away with the monstrosities of useless beauties. If the ideal sinks to the real the real rises to the ideal.

Honest Man Needs No Sobriquet.

By John A. Howland.

TWICE within the week I have chanced to see newspaper accounts of the fall of "Honest John" Somebody, after years of immaculate integrity which had earned for them the sobriquet. Chief of these offenders was the cashier of a bank who for thirty years or more had enjoyed the confidence of every one who knew him.

Frankly I have little sympathy for anything but the lack of discernment on the part of the depositors in this bank. In my experience of men long ago I learned to look twice upon the "Honest" Johns, and Bills, and Jims, who have appeared on my horizon. I have learned to dislike the sobriquet quite as much as I have learned to distrust the man who wears it.

In my observation it is inconsistent with true honesty that a man should wear the badge of it upon his sleeve. At best honesty is a matter of social training. If there were only one man in all the world, theft would be impossible. Not until another person appeared on his horizon would the necessity of honesty appeal to the two of them in any sense. In just the proportion that populations crowd together this opportunity for theft increases and laws are framed to punish it. Over millions of square miles of rural communities in this country are scattered farmhouses in which lock and bolt never are turned against a possible intruder. Theft is a vice of the massed communities. It dies out largely under conditions which scatter these populations to the simple life.

When Australia first was made a penal colony for the thieves that evolved in the crowded cities of Great Britain, these first settlers scattered there learned the first real lessons in real honesty. It didn't pay John Smith to try to steal William Jones' sheep, for if he did James Brown might descend upon Smith some night and take both flocks! "Honesty is the best policy" became apparent, with the result that in a comparatively short time this original penal colony was up in arms, protesting against Great Britain's "dumping" her criminals there!

With honesty accepted as a matter of training and wider knowledge, the significance of the "Honest" John appellation becomes apparent. There is no John in christendom who would not have resented at first utterance the sobriquet of "Wise" John Somebody, or "Intelligent" John Somebody. He would feel instantly that however much truth lay in the adjective, it would be redundant to those who knew him, while it would be laughed at by those outside his acquaintance. He would be willing to let his wisdom, knowledge, and intelligence prove themselves.

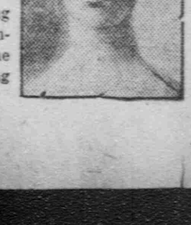
In the same way, too, that man who is wise enough to be honest in the simple guise in which true honesty inevitably must appear, must balk at anything which would attach such an adjective to his name. To allow such a designation to attach to him would require the disposition of the poser in the man. It is not unlikely that the beginning of such a cognomen arises through some rather unusual opportunity for the person to display an act of striking honesty which attracts widespread attention at the time. The honesty of the act may be undisputed, yet the dishonesty of purpose behind such an act well may be questioned.

It cannot be disputed that men unwillingly are forced to good deeds through force of public opinion. This public opinion may have a driving force, or an inviting force. Public praise in either case is the reward. The man who submits to the driving influence may be quite as honest at heart as the man who yields to the more subtle influence of invitation. Yet the appellation of "honest" may be attached only to the one who, with a little more of selfish foresight, anticipates his opportunity!

The other day in a crowded city street I walked just behind a young man in light colored overcoat, gray trousers, and tan shoes, who wore a wide band of crêpe on his left sleeve! I did not catch sight of his face, but other senses showed me that he was smoking a cigaret! Will the reader admit that anything in the appearance of this man could have appealed to him in suggestion of real grief and mourning? I don't believe such sentiment was in the heart of that man. All of it was on his sleeve! In connection with every other item of dress this band of mourning was too absurdly contradictory to be real. Its absurdity must have shocked a nature fine enough to have experienced the full measure of a great grief.

Honesty in its true sense comes of a man's intangible idealism. Honesty begins in training. To the child the lash may be the first hard lesson in the virtue. But to the nature competent to appreciate it, gradually this point of view as to honesty shifts around until the man's honesty becomes personally an ideal. He seeks to satisfy himself of his honesty. He doesn't care what the world at large may think of his actions.

To the honest man of this type, how impossible would be his acceptance of the cognomen of "honest!" It is in this type of man that the least discerning of men must read far more convincingly in his face the honesty that is in his heart! It is only in the face and bearing of a man that one is justified in accepting, offhand, a mere evidence of honesty. Just as the conventional crêpe on the arm of the man means nothing, unless face and bearing speak grief, so the honesty of the "Honest" John counts for naught.



Posing of any kind is incompatible with the possession of the thing for which one poses. In full possession of the reality, there could be no incentive to pose. It doesn't occur to the person that posing could be necessary or worth while. Always this posturing is prompted by the thought of covering up a weakness. Especially do the inherent virtues of men suffer from any form of exploitation.

To the young man I would say, don't pose! You can deceive no one but yourself, in the end!

Love's Young Dream Not All Sweetness.

By Helen Oldfield.

THERE'S nothing half so sweet in life
As Love's young dream"—

So sings the poet; the sentiment was not new when he did so, and in prose and in poetry it many times has been reiterated, until, partly because of much repetition, it has come to be generally accepted as indubitable fact.

Nevertheless Love's young dream, however sweet, seldom is unadulterated bliss; there is poignancy in its pleasure which closely is akin to pain, and its honey is not unmixed with gall. When a youth falls in love with a maiden, when a maid finds herself dreaming, by night and by day, of some charming youth who she thinks, but is not quite sure, smiles on her, there usually are a few if not many bad quarters of an hour in store for the lovers who have to endure the ups and downs of the tender passion. The course of true love by no means always runs smooth, even when the lovers are sure of each other, and there must always be a period of uncertainty beforehand during which they figuratively are on tenterhooks.

Ovid says that love is the perpetual source of fears and anxieties, a statement which always, in one way or another, is more or less true, and especially so when the love is but a dream, and that dream is young. Another, more modern, authority tells us that diffidence and awkwardness are powerful antidotes to love, which, if it be true, is a pity, since these so often accompany the first stages of love; indeed, the more genuine the affection the greater the probability that the victim thereof will be painfully shy and distressingly awkward: since among the most certain symptoms of a love affair is that of overwhelming shyness.

When men and women fall in love, unless they are mature and experienced veterans who cannot truly be said to fall, much less to tumble head over heels, in love, as is the manner of callow, unsophisticated youth, almost always they suddenly become unaccountably bashful—the old English word is the only one which covers the state in which they find themselves.

"Though she ain't any size, while I'm
Considerable tall,
I'm nowhere when she speaks to me,
She makes me feel so small.
My face grows red, my tongue gets hitched,
The cussed thing won't go;
O, darn it all! afeerd of a gal!"

They are bold as lions when they are alone, and compose the most clever and effective speeches, not one of which do they make when opportunity offers. Tongue tied and embarrassed, they are like actors who have forgotten their parts; they are stage struck and cannot deliver with any intelligence a single one of the most trifling of the well rehearsed effects which before seemed so easy of accomplishment.

What is the matter? Simply that there has come to them one of the most common and unmistakable signs of the dawn of true love. The casual observer calls it shyness, but those who know understand it for humanity, and realize that even the most conceited of men and women, when they truly fall in love, are obsessed with the sense of their own unworthiness and at the same time exaggerate the value of the person with whom they are impassioned.

The more deeply one is in love the heavier is the handicap. Emerson says that "nothing so much prevents our being natural as the desire of appearing so," and so well is this fact understood that when young men or women show decided change in their ways and manners outsiders are apt to accuse them of being in love. When a girl observes a sudden change in the manner towards her of a man whom she has long known, when, instead of being polite and pleasant after his usual custom, he becomes gruff and almost rude in his behavior, she naturally is surprised. But the beginning of love often is manifested by just such conduct as this.

Indeed, there are well authenticated instances where the stricken lover actually avoids the object of his new born passion, hoping to get over it, since he has no expectation that it can be mutual. So he keeps away from the woman whose image possesses his heart, convinced that the beloved She is altogether too good for him, broods much upon the complex difficulties of life, makes himself a mystery to his friends and a burden to himself, until at length good sense returns to him and he goes forth to woo with a determination to win the paragon, who probably is merely a commonplace woman, and quite willing to be won.

Girls will declare that they do not care the least bit for a man for whom they every instant are breathing a message of love in silence, for whose favor, if they are religious, they are beseeching their patron saint. They will purposely and obviously keep out of his way and when they meet him will be chilling and indifferent of behavior and even display open preference for another. Yet the initiated in the ways of love know that here, too, are the signals of love as taught by the same feminine instinct which teaches a bird to lead the passerby away from her nest, an arrant deception which deceives no one, excepting for a time the man whom it is intended to torment.

It is during this state of hesitancy and diffidence that the thoughtless teasing of friends, who probably mean no harm, does so much. Many an incipient love affair is nipped in the bud by the incautious, sometimes rough handling to which it is subjected by being held up to inspection, not to say ridicule. There are some things which thrive best with judicious letting alone.